

# HAWAII RURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

*"Improving the quality of life through economic opportunities in rural communities..."*



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## **Comments to USDA Under Secretary Thomas C. Dorr 2007 Farm Bill Listening Session Sheraton Keauhou Bay Resort, Kona, Hawai'i Presented by Dale R. Burton on behalf of the Hawai'i Rural Development Council November 12, 2005**

Good morning, Under Secretary Dorr, and welcome to Hawai'i. My name is Dale Burton. I serve on the Hawai'i Rural Development Council Board of Directors. The Hawai'i Rural Development Council has been certified as the Federally Recognized State Rural Development Council in the National Rural Development Partnership.

Hawai'i is a unique chain of islands known the world over for hospitality and beautiful landscape. Agriculture has played a significant role in the development of Hawai'i, and as you have surely heard there are many efforts underway to continue to diversify our agriculture efforts across the state. Rural communities in Hawai'i have experienced changes similar to those faced by other rural communities across the country. Rural areas must now also contend with the ever increasing pace of technological innovation, social and demographic shifts that are changing the faces of our communities, and continued difficulties in providing adequate infrastructure, among other issues.

In light of these challenges, we ask for your support in the continued implementation of the National Rural Development Partnership elements of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002. We applaud USDA's leadership in this regard despite a lack of Congressional appropriation; however more can be done to meet the intent of "better coordinating rural policies and programs of federal agencies." Much progress has been made by state rural development councils across the country to advocate on behalf of and provide support to their rural communities. In Hawai'i, there is no other statewide organization engaged in or capable of taking such a broad perspective on rural issues facing the state.

We ask that the USDA take the following actions:

1. Implement the National Rural Development Coordinating Committee immediately.
2. Provide emergency funding to State Rural Development Councils while the new structure is being implemented.
3. Recommend full funding of the National Rural Development Partnership in the 2007 Farm Bill, as authorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 but never appropriated.

The National Rural Development Partnership is the natural vehicle through which rural challenges may be addressed. The State Rural Development Councils, by working with the National Rural Development Coordinating Committee, will provide an important and unique means through which the federal government can constructively interact with other public entities and the private sector to serve Rural America. The key to this success is threefold: 1) bringing together both public and private partners; 2) assuring that these entities work together efficiently and effectively to serve rural communities; 3) and providing a neutral forum within which to address the issues facing local rural communities.

We look forward to working with USDA staff in the future to address the needs of rural communities in Hawai'i. Thank you for your time and interest in our input for the 2007 Farm Bill.